

Manitoba

Anti-lockdown supporters rally against COVID-19-related restrictions outside Manitoba legislature

Group says harms of lockdowns due to pandemic outweigh benefits

[Dana Hatherly](#) · CBC News · Posted: May 09, 2020 8:09 PM CT | Last Updated: May 9, 2020



Anti-lockdown protesters gather at Manitoba Legislative Building on Saturday. (Mohamed-Amin Kehel/CBC-Radio-Canada)

A group that says pandemic-related restrictions are more harmful than COVID-19 itself held a rally at the Manitoba Legislative Building on Saturday.

Some of the more-than-70 participants rallying in the name of freedom and human rights held up signs with messages such as "no more lockdowns", "no basis to remain closed" and "social distancing = fake science", despite provincial public health orders that ban gatherings of ten or more people.

A spokesperson said the group is made up of parents and grandparents who felt like their collective voice was being left out of coverage, so they held a rally to let their voices be heard.

"After eight weeks of lockdown, we were frustrated, especially that they were announcing that it might continue in a less form for the next several months," said Gerry Bohémier, a former chiropractor.

"We thought 'enough is enough'."

Bohémier, who is part of the group Winnipeg Aware, said the restrictions do more harm than good for both the economy and people's health — pointing to the effects of unemployment such as anxiety, stress, drug use, suicide and crime as a result of restricting society and the economy.

"We have had a pandemic of fear here. We should never do that again. It causes more deaths than the virus could've ever caused," he said, adding we just need to "adopt better ways of building our defences" against future viruses.

Some protesters in Winnipeg carried an upside-down Canadian flag during the event.





Protesters in front of the Manitoba legislature say harms of widespread lockdowns due to pandemic outweigh benefits. (Mohamed-Amin Kehel/Radio-Canada)

As of May 4, Manitoba relaxed restrictions on some non-essential businesses that were ordered to close, such as restaurant patios, hair salons and massage therapy. Public health officials continue encouraging people to wash their hands and sanitize, keep at least two metres apart, monitor for symptoms and stay home when sick.

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Bohémier said he believes there is no science to back the closures and no proof it will eliminate the spread of the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19.

"We've had pandemics in the past, this is not our first cinema of the whole thing," he said, adding that viruses have existed for "millions" of years.

"We've always been scared to death that these things are going to be coming at us," he said.





Anti-lockdown protesters carrying their own signs gather near a public service announcement that encourages physical distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic. (Mohamed-Amin Kehel/CBC-Radio-Canada)

The Premier's office said it will continue to follow the advice of health care experts and Manitoba's chief public health officer.

"Our government's number one priority is to protect the health and well being of all Manitobans, especially those most vulnerable," a spokesperson for Premier Brian Pallister said in a statement on Saturday.

Winnipeg mayor Brian Bowman, meantime, was critical of the province for appearing to not enforce its own public health orders.

Mayor Brian Bowman 
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City's Community Service Ambassadors/Bylaw officers are supporting enforcement of MB health orders in City parks only. MB health order enforcement is responsibility of MB officials everywhere else incl at the MB Legislature. Doesn't look like the Province had officials on hand.

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A spokesperson for the province told Radio-Canada on Friday that while the Manitoba government's Justice Protective Services would monitor the event, it was up to the police to enforce any laws or public health orders.

"The Manitoba Government respects the rights of Canadians to voice their views, but encourage everyone to respect the public health orders and maintain their physical distance to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19," the province said in a statement on Friday.

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With files from CBC/Radio-Canada's Mohamed-Amin Kehel

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